

Deal for a silver 'kilo-eagle' just doesn't fly

By Roger Boye

Today's column answers more questions about coins and currency.

Q—I have the chance to buy a giant "kilo-eagle" for \$398, postpaid. The coin contains about 32 troy ounces of silver. What do you think of that offer?

T. H., Glenview

A—Not much. The silver in a "kilo-eagle" is worth about \$170 at current precious-metal prices. As a privately issued bullion item (not a coin), the "kilo-eagle" probably will never gain value as a collectible.

If you want to buy silver because you think it's cheap right now, you should invest your \$398 in Uncle Sam's American Eagle coins or in silver bars because you'll get much more silver for your money.

Q—Why are certain types of 1913 nickels worth big money? Is a 1909 nickel also valuable?

B. N., Hammond, Ind.

A—The government began producing so-called "Indian-head nickels" in 1913, but a mint employee made in secret a handful of nickels with the old Liberty-head design. One of the five specimens known today sold for

\$385,000 in 1985.

Most of the other Liberty nickels have just modest values on the hobby market. All of the coins struck between 1900 and 1912 in Philadelphia and in "good condition" sell for about 50 cents each.

Incidentally, thousands of fake 1913 Liberty nickels are known, almost all of them made by altering the date on a 1903 or a 1912 nickel.

Q—My mother has saved about 150 silver certificate \$1 bills, all from series years 1935 and 1957. I know that the government will no longer exchange them for silver, but are any of her bills worth more than \$1?

C. W., Berwyn

A—Almost all silver certificates of the various 1935 and 1957 series retail for \$2.50 or less if they show even the slightest signs of wear. Crisp, uncirculated specimens usually sell in the \$2.50 to \$7 range.

Wholesale prices are even lower. Many dealers won't buy silver certificates of the 1935 and 1957 series unless the bills are in uncirculated condition.